



Rochester Youth Year AmeriCorps*VISTA Fellowship Program Frequently Asked Questions for Prospective Fellows

Q: What is the Rochester Youth Year Fellowship?

A: The Rochester Youth Year Fellowship is a post-graduate fellowship for recent graduates of seven Rochester-area colleges. The Rochester Youth Year program seeks to bring the talent and enthusiasm of local college graduates to bear on the challenges confronting the youth of Rochester, many of whom experience poverty. Through their work in community-based organizations, RYY Fellows are expected to develop and enhance their host organizations' programs and relationships with youth and families through volunteer recruitment, resource development, and substantive collaboration with other organizations.

Q: What is AmeriCorps*VISTA?

A: AmeriCorps*VISTA is the only national service program designed specifically to alleviate poverty by helping individuals and low income neighborhoods to make positive changes for themselves. Founded as Volunteers in Service to America in 1965 and incorporated into the AmeriCorps network of programs in 1993, VISTA has been on the front lines in the fight against poverty in America for more than 40 years. AmeriCorps*VISTA is a public service program of the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), an agency of the federal government. VISTA provides full-time members to nonprofit community organizations and public agencies to create and expand programs that ultimately bring low-income individuals out of poverty.

Q: How is the Rochester Youth Year Fellowship connected to AmeriCorps*VISTA?

A: The Rochester Youth Year Fellowship first received AmeriCorps*VISTA grant funding in 2008. Each RYY Fellow is also an AmeriCorps*VISTA member and receives pay and benefits through AmeriCorps*VISTA. RYY program staff at the University of Rochester include a program director and an AmeriCorps*VISTA Leader. They work with CNCS and the RRN to ensure that the program is meeting both AmeriCorps*VISTA goals and the core mission and vision of the RYY program.

Q: What is the Rochester Regional Network?

A: The Rochester Regional Network (RRN) is a consortium of seven institutions of higher education in the Rochester-area. This network administers the Rochester Youth Year Fellowship by setting general program policy, determining long-term goals and strategies, recruiting program participants, and providing training opportunities for RYY Fellows. The RRN supports the operation of the RYY program through annual membership fees. The following colleges and universities participate in the RRN: the College at Brockport, Nazareth College, SUNY Geneseo, Roberts Wesleyan College, Rochester Institute of Technology, St. John Fisher College, and the University of Rochester. The RYY program is based at the University of Rochester.

Individual representatives to the RRN:

- **The College at Brockport, SUNY:** Karen Podsiadly, Director for Leadership and Community Development
- **Nazareth College:** Adam Lewandowski, Assistant Director for Community Service
- **Roberts Wesleyan College:** Brenda Myrthil, Assistant Dean for Student Programming
- **Rochester Institute of Technology:** Phyllis Walker, Assistant Director for RLI Leadership & Community Service
- **St. John Fisher College:** Sally Vaughan, Service Scholarship Program Coordinator
- **SUNY Geneseo:** Tom Matthews, Director for Leadership Education
- **University of Rochester*:** Glenn Cerosaletti, Director of Rochester Center for Community Leadership

*Host Site

Q: What benefits will I receive for participating in the Rochester Youth Year AmeriCorps*VISTA program?

A: There are several benefits associated with RYY and AmeriCorps*VISTA.

- A modest bi-weekly living allowance
- A \$4,725 AmeriCorps Education Award (can be applied to federal student loans or future education expenses for up to 7 years) or a \$1,200 end of service stipend to members who successfully complete a full term of service.
- Student Loan Forbearance or Deferment of qualified loans.
- Repayment of interest accrued on qualified student loans (contact your lender for more specific information or to confirm your loan status during AmeriCorps*VISTA service)
- Non-Competitive Eligibility for most federal jobs after term of service
- Limited healthcare and prescription drug coverage (visit www.americorps.sevendcorners.com)
- Reimbursement for relocation travel expenses, if eligible
- Relocation allowance of up to \$500, if eligible
- Ten personal days and ten sick days
- Frequent professional development opportunities
- Child care allowance of up to \$400 per month, if eligible
- Life Insurance (can waive)

Q: I'm supposed to live on a modest living allowance? How?

A: It isn't easy but it is 100% doable. Fellows are great budgeters and very crafty in making ends meet. Some fellows choose apply for government assistance (primarily food stamps). All fellows commit to this public service program for the experience, not the paycheck. With that said, note that your federal student loans, if you have any, are eligible for interest-free forbearance during your service year. The RYY program is constantly exploring new benefits to offer Fellows so please keep in mind that the list above may not include everything we will be able to offer Fellows for the program year of 2010-2011. We are committed to doing everything we can to making this opportunity viable for all who are interested.

Q: Can you describe the Education Award in more detail?

A: The AmeriCorps Education Award is a huge benefit to RYY Fellows and can be used to pay education costs at qualified institutions of higher education, for educational training, or to repay qualified student loans (i.e. federally-backed student loans in your name). You can access the award in full or in part, and you

have up to seven years after your term of service has ended to claim the award. The awards are not paid directly to you, but rather to the educational institution or lender you designate. If you won't be using the award for the above educational purposes, you may instead claim an end-of-service stipend of \$1,200. The awards are subject to available education trust allocations to AmeriCorps*VISTA. Both the education award and the stipend are taxable.

Q: How is the health coverage?

A: Health coverage is provided by the federal government through the AmeriCorps*VISTA program. Please be aware that pre-existing medical conditions are not covered by this plan. From the Corporation for National and Community Service: "The medical benefits plan covers all injuries and/or illnesses suffered during service and most pharmacy needs. The plan does not cover medical care for pre-existing medical illnesses and/or injuries." For more comprehensive information on the plan, visit www.americorps.sevencorners.com.

Q: What are the goals of the RYY Fellowship Program?

A: RYY goals evolve yearly with the various projects that constitute our program. However, there are three overarching program goals that guide the specific objectives at each host site. We take progress on these goals and objectives seriously; progress is assessed through monthly and quarterly reports, which are ultimately reviewed by CNCS. While RYY program staff will work with individual host organizations to develop appropriate objectives, all RYY projects must align with the following overarching goals:

- **Alleviating the Effects of Poverty on Youth**
RYY Fellows will work with their host organization and necessary stakeholders to develop measureable, sustainable services and programs that address the self-identified needs of Rochester's youth and aim to build on their strengths and assets.
- **Strengthening Communities**
RYY Fellows will work to build the capacity of their host organizations to develop and/or enhance programs that engage youth and families in positive and productive activities and initiatives. Equally important, RYY Fellows will work to empower youth and families to take an active role in improving their own neighborhoods.
- **Promoting Civic Engagement and Community-Centered Leadership**
RYY Fellows will create lasting partnerships between the community, their host organizations, and their alma mater. Serving as role models and liaisons, they will engage college communities in substantial opportunities to contribute to the life of the Rochester community.

Q: What community organizations in Rochester host RYY Fellows?

A: There are nine organizations currently hosting RYY Fellows. Participating organizations are subject to change each program year.

During this program year (2009-2010), the following organizations are hosting RYY Fellows:

- Biz Kid\$ (City of Rochester)
- The Center for Youth Services
- Compeer Rochester
- Pathstone

- Rochester Monroe County Youth Bureau
- Successful Pathways
- Westside Health Services: Brown Square Health Center
- World of Inquiry School
- Writers & Books

Q: Where can I find an application?

A: Two application forms are required: a Rochester Youth Year program application and an AmeriCorps*VISTA application.

Applications for Rochester Youth Year can be found at each of the colleges participating in the Rochester Regional Network (RRN). Representatives from each college will have applications to distribute to graduating seniors. A listing of representatives in the RRN can be found above. The career center at your college will have applications as well. You can also find the application online at www.youthyear.org.

AmeriCorps*VISTA applications must be completed online. **Only those candidates who are accepted into the RYY program will be asked to complete an AmeriCorps*VISTA application**, which includes reference forms.

Q: What does the application process entail?

A: We are accepting applications through March 12th, 2010. Use the application worksheet at www.youthyear.org/apply. Although all applications will be reviewed with equal consideration, we encourage interested candidates to submit their applications well in advance of the deadline. Selected applicants will be invited to interview with Rochester Youth Year program staff during the week of March 29rd, 2010. We hope to accept 10 applicants into the program. RYY Fellows will be selected by April 5th. Those applicants who accept our offer will then interview at three host organizations during the month of April. Final placements will be determined by April 30th. Acceptance as an RYY AmeriCorps*VISTA member is contingent on federal approval of your AmeriCorps*VISTA application and your participation in required trainings (see next question).

Q: Will there be trainings and/or an orientation prior to my start date?

A: RYY program staff will provide incoming fellows with a one day orientation of the City of Rochester. We will address the common challenges of community building and will review different models of community organizing. Each RYY Fellow is required to attend a **mandatory** 4-day AmeriCorps*VISTA Pre-Service Orientation (PSO) immediately prior to their first day at their host agencies. This PSO is funded by CNCS. RYY Fellows' PSO dates will determine their start date. At the conclusion of PSO, each RYY Fellow will be officially sworn in as an AmeriCorps*VISTA. An on-site orientation will be provided by the supervisor at each host organization.

Q: Are there any prohibited activities?

A: Due to RYY's relationship with the AmeriCorps*VISTA program, RYY Fellows **must not**:

- Be involved with political advocacy, religious instruction, voter registration, union organizing, or lobbying while serving or identifying themselves as an AmeriCorps*VISTA member
- Displace the work, or what should be the work, of paid employees of the host organizations, particularly tasks typically reserved for administrative and/or clerical positions. AmeriCorps*VISTA members are to engage in project-based work.
- Engage in direct service
- Receive any monetary contribution from their host organization to supplement their bi-weekly stipend.
- Enroll in credit-bearing courses during their service term without approval from RYY program staff and CNCS.

Q: What type of work will I be doing as a RYY Fellow?

A: The RYY program has established three priority issues under which all projects fall: education, public safety, and health and wellness. While each position in the RYY program will differ based on the host organization's proposed project, all share several overarching goals and broad strategies for achieving AmeriCorps*VISTA and Rochester Youth Year objectives. Our main goal is to empower youth experiencing poverty by directly engaging them in the work of strengthening their community. Although all RYY Fellows will work towards that end, methods will vary across host organizations. All positions will build the capacity not only of the host organization, but of Rochester youth and families to be their own advocates. RYY Fellows often recruit volunteers, develop resources, and most importantly, build partnerships, to achieve their goals. RYY Fellows work from 35-40 hours per week. Work hours are contingent on project needs and will vary across host organizations.

Q: Why should I apply to the Rochester Youth Year Program?

A: The Rochester Youth Year Program is an excellent opportunity for new college graduates. Aside from the aforementioned benefits, there are many reasons to consider applying.

- ***Not your average entry level job.*** As a one year public service program, RYY provides newly minted graduates with an opportunity to conduct substantial and meaningful work. While many entry-level jobs are heavily administrative, a position with RYY guarantees you a highly valuable hands-on experience, which will benefit you professionally and enrich you personally.
- ***A great transitional opportunity.*** Many people who take positions with AmeriCorps*VISTA also use their year of service as a transition to graduate school or other work opportunities.
- ***Resume.*** Public service programs are huge resume boosters!
- ***Selectivity.*** The renewed emphasis on civic duty is making public service programs—and AmeriCorps*VISTA in particular—increasingly attractive to college graduates, thereby increasing the selectivity of programs such as ours.
- ***Networking.*** RYY Fellows are community organizers. We try to integrate the principles of asset-based community development (ABCD) into our goals and activities as often as possible. This work is all about building relationships and forming partnerships. You will meet many people over the course of the year, many of whom will likely be helpful to you as you pursue future endeavors.
- ***Make a difference.*** Whether you've lived in Rochester for just four years or it is your hometown, you know Rochester is a city with both a great number of assets and significant challenges. RYY gives you an opportunity to use your knowledge and skills to improve our city.

Still have a question or two? Still harboring some doubt about applying? PLEASE EMAIL US @ rochester@youthyear.org or visit www.youthyear.org for more information!

We can also put you in touch with current RYY VISTAs so you can hear more about their individual experiences in the program.